"Nice White Meetings": Unpacking Absurd Library Bureaucracy through a Critical Race Theory Lens

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ABSTRACT

Although the issues of diversity and representation are often discussed within academic librarianship in Canada and the United States, the field has made little headway in being inclusive of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) who work within it. If academic libraries are to become truly authentic and inclusive spaces where BIPOC are central not only to shaping the values of a library but also to determining how those values are accomplished, we must examine the traditional ways in which libraries function. One of these traditions is a reliance on bureaucracy and its associated practices such as structured group work and meetings, which are presumed to be inherently neutral and rational ways of working. Critical examinations of bureaucracy within higher education reveal how its overadoption is absurdly at odds with the social justice–oriented missions of most libraries. Furthermore, not all who are involved in libraries are equally harmed through this overreliance on bureaucracy; this article employs Critical Race Theory to uncover the insidious and specific deleterious impacts bureaucracy can have on BIPOC library workers. The antithesis of a neutral system, bureaucracy instead functions to force assimilation into a system entrenched in whiteness.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory · library bureaucracy · meeting culture · white supremacy

RÉSUMÉ

Bien que les questions de diversité et de représentation soient souvent discutées au sein des bibliothèques universitaires au Canada et aux États-Unis, le domaine a peu progressé pour inclure les personnes autochtones, noires et de couleur (PANDC) qui y travaillent. Si les bibliothèques universitaires doivent devenir des espaces véritablement authentiques et inclusifs où les PANDC sont essentielles non seulement pour façonner les valeurs d'une bibliothèque, mais aussi pour déterminer comment ces valeurs prennent forme, nous devons examiner les modes de fonctionnement traditionnels des bibliothèques. L'une de ces traditions est le recours à la bureaucratie et aux pratiques qui lui sont associées, comme les réunions et les travaux de groupe structurés, qui, prétendument, sont des méthodes de travail intrinsèquement neutres et rationnelles. L'examen critique de la bureaucratie dans l'enseignement supérieur révèle que son adoption excessive est en contradiction absurde avec les missions de justice sociale de la plupart des bibliothèques. En outre, toutes les parties prenantes des bibliothèques ne sont pas également lésées par cette dépendance excessive à la bureaucratie. Cet article utilise la théorie critique de la race pour découvrir les effets délétères insidieux et précis que la bureaucratie peut avoir sur les PANDC qui travaillent dans les bibliothèques. Antithèse d'un système neutre, la bureaucratie a pour effet de forcer l'assimilation à un système enraciné dans la blanchité.

Mots-clés : *bureaucratie des bibliothèques · culture de la rencontre · suprémacisme blanc · théorie critique de la race*

L‍IBRARIES in higher education in Canada and the United States rely heavily upon bureaucratic systems to function, often with the aim of ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in accomplishing our stated missions and goals. Committees are formed, workgroups given charges, strategic plans are written up. An overreliance on bureaucratic systems and, in particular, structured group work, can cause all library workers to become frustrated with inefficiencies and a perceived lack of transparency. Even worse, these bureaucratic systems can have singularly disastrous effects on Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), serving to preserve whiteness in libraries and requiring BIPOC to assimilate, suffer in silence, or leave. Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Crenshaw et al. 1995) is a framework that arose out of legal studies scholarship by BIPOC lawyers, scholars, and students (Leung and López-McKnight 2020, 19) and provides the vital language to understand and challenge endemic bureaucratic practices that too often disregard the experiential knowledge BIPOC bring to their roles (Solórzano and Yosso 2002; Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 2021). CRT reveals that such practices

> are central to an ideology of equal opportunity that presents race as an immutable characteristic devoid of social meaning and tells an ahistorical, abstracted story of racial inequality as a series of randomly occurring, intentional, and individualized acts. (Lawrence et al. 2018, 6)

Identifying and openly naming the institutional racism inherent in libraries, bureaucracies, and library bureaucracies not only allows us to better understand the historical oppression of BIPOC, but also facilitates engagement in what Sofia Leung and Jorge López-McKnight (2020) refer to as "dreaming our futures," or migrating into spaces and systems that are "more authentic, liberatory, and imaginative" (18). In this paper, we will apply a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to unpack the deleterious impacts of bureaucracies on BIPOC library workers specifically and argue that these impacts are an intentional outcome of a system meant to maintain white hegemony.

Bureaucracies in Higher Education and Academic Libraries

Despite its pejorative connotation, *bureaucracy* as envisioned by German sociologist Max Weber in the early 20th century continues to be revered as an organizational and management paradigm in higher education. Weber (2013) observed that the six prevailing characteristics of an ideal bureaucracy are authority over specific, jurisdictional areas; office hierarchies; maintenance of written documentation; technical competency through expert training; labour that extends beyond the obligatory time spent in the bureau; and an objective and impersonal adherence to rules and regulations. Today, bureaucracy presents as *managerialism* in colleges and universities, which mimics practices more commonly found in the private sector, including organizational assessment, efficiency, and output effectiveness (Whitchurch and Gordon 2010).

Some of the qualities of managerialism in higher education identified by Celia Whitchurch and George Gordon (2010) that neatly map to Weber's bureaucratic characteristics include accountability measures resulting in increased regulation of academics' work; transferred authority from academic staff to managers, which weakens the professional status of academics and does not allow for the ability for staff to gain sufficient experience to advance; and clear separations between academic work and management activities. *New managerialism*, which applies practices common in corporate businesses to higher education by promoting a business-focused approach (Deem, Hillyard, and Reed 2007), purports to be a departure from bureaucracy, but is in fact a model that leads to even greater regulation (Deem 2017). New managerialism, with its re-entrenchment in bureaucratic practices as well as a focus on "the bottom line," thereby results in an environment in which diversity and difference cannot truly exist because to do so would be inherently less efficient (and less "profitable").

Academic libraries are often assumed to be proponents of intellectual freedom and social justice (Honma 2005) and, on the surface level, this perception is

confirmed by their stated values and policies. In fact, a quick perusal of university library mission statements shows that libraries proclaim to be invested in the well-being of students, faculty, and staff, with the result that library workers may have expectations based on these stated values that their workplaces are flexible and democratic (Lynch 1979, 266). However, academic libraries rarely function in this way, especially within a new managerialism environment, because flexibility and democratic structures invite disagreement and (as stated previously) are considered inefficient. Libraries maintain an outward appearance of "inherent goodness" and egalitarianism (Honma 2005), while enacting bureaucratic processes that undermine such aims. This attitude stems from the purportedly altruistic policies and practices of America's early libraries, which touted the values of an informed citizenry and lifelong learning. In truth, these ostensibly egalitarian principles allowed libraries to facilitate assimilation and acculturation through a "whitening process whereby European ethnics possessed a particular ethnic mobility based on the colour of their skin that allowed them membership to a white racial identity" (Honma 2005, 7). This "whitening process" was a means of exercising control over BIPOC and, in this way, libraries have been historically complicit in racial stratification and forced cultural assimilation.

Although Weber saw bureaucracies as "the very embodiment of Reason in human affairs, so obviously superior to any alternative form of organization" (Graeber 2015, 55), the opposite may actually hold true, particularly when it comes to many common practices in academia such as meetings and structured group work. In describing municipal planning meetings, Simone Abram writes that these meetings are "ritual performances in which explicit rules are enacted through tacit knowledge . . . and formal transparency is intertwined with relational and informational withholding" (2017, 29). Abram's example is applicable to academic libraries where meetings manifest as part of what Annemarie Davis, Mari Jansen van Rensburg, and Peet Venter refer to as a *culture of conformance* in which faculty must demonstrate their compliance with "goals, objectives, rules, and instructions" (2017, 1487) provided by administrative personnel. And, CRT reveals that this culture of conformance is complicit in maintaining not only administrative power over those lower in the hierarchy, but also racial power over BIPOC library workers within the organization. Although supposedly meetings are used to ensure that "all voices are heard," they are often the venues in which conformance is visibly displayed through the tracking of performance targets and regular progress reports (Davis, Jansen van Rensburg, and Venter 2017, 1487). Strategic decisions are already made by administrators, but absurdly (or perversely), middle managers are forced to convene working groups and committees to give the appearance of democratic decision-making, which can be demoralizing for all actors involved in the process. Library administrators and/or

managers promise that if library workers will just participate in these meetings, then the library mission will be accomplished, but often the participation in bureaucracy becomes the product itself and the mission is never fulfilled.

David Graeber (2015) provides an explanation for this phenomenon: that although the adoption of bureaucratic practices is supposed to be a way towards equity and efficiency, it is in fact a tool to maintain power structures. Structured collaboration can be effective in order to get things done; however, it seems that too often these groups more effectively serve other unstated purposes that hide below the surface—obvious to some, although perhaps not to many. Sometimes, these groups are formed to hide fait accompli, top-down decisions under the guise of group decision-making and stakeholder consultation. These groups can also be formed in hopes of minimizing one person's or department's influence on an initiative or effort. In effect, bureaucracy within academic libraries functions to provide the *appearance* of work being accomplished while simultaneously keeping library workers occupied, without enabling the actual accomplishment of work that might upset existing and historically oppressive power structures.

This divergence between words and actions comes at the expense of BIPOC who exist within these environments. Baharak Yousefi observes that there is a clear "disconnect between our professional values of democracy and social responsibility and our decisions and actions. We routinely make decisions that oppose our declared values" (2017, 92). When libraries' decisions do not match their social justice–oriented missions *and*, in the process of being enacted, cause further harm to BIPOC employees, it is evident that the declared values are tools meant to sustain the status quo (Yousefi 2017). Nowhere is the bureaucratic apparatus more apparent than in library hiring practices, where job descriptions are elegantly wordsmithed to reflect a commitment to hire candidates from a diverse candidate pool. Bureaucratic screening processes around hiring (e.g., requiring certain degrees and qualifications or years of experience) allow libraries to maneuver around diversity requirements. For example, in discussing degrees earned through online programs, Angela Galvan (2015) notes that "screening policies . . . [may] exclude promising applicants unable to enroll in face-to-face programs" due to financial constraints and familial/work obligations. Instead, Galvan goes on to observe, libraries are partial to those candidates whose applications reflect access to material wealth and time. Bureaucratic practices allow libraries to simply continue the status quo because it is easier, "rather than advocating for different views by picking 'unfamiliar' candidates who might interrogate the processes" (2015). When libraries decide to form committees to address inequities within the organization, April Hathcock writes that diversity is then seen as "a problem that must be solved, with diverse librarians becoming the objectified pawns

deployed to attack the problem" (2015). It is absurd that BIPOC librarians are usually tasked with serving on such committees and thus held responsible for fixing the organizations that actively oppress them.

Anecdotes also abound of library workers crafting recommendations and providing detailed feedback and concerns, only for upper management to enact something entirely different—giving the appearance (rightly or wrongly) that they had already predetermined the solution. As frustrating as it is for white library workers to engage in such absurd work situations, it is additionally demoralizing for BIPOC library workers. Not only do they have to participate in a process which they have reason to distrust for reasons we have explored above, but during this participation they are also subjected to being challenged more frequently than their white counterparts and to having their experiences and expertise more frequently discounted. As such, the less emotionally taxing method of handling such a situation is to not call out the absurdity but instead to agree with the others.

The Unbearable Whiteness of Library Bureaucracy: How CRT Contextualizes Oppression

While espousing socially progressive values gives the appearance that library workers are invested in a shared purpose, Diane Gusa's concept of White Institutional Presence (WIP) illustrates how

> White normative messages and practices . . . are exchanged within the academic milieu. When these messages remain subtle, nebulous, and unnamed, they potentially harm the wellbeing, self-esteem, and academic success of those who do not share the norms of White culture. (2010, 471)

As an extension of WIP, academic library work is rooted in the dominant worldview of whiteness that has existed since the founding of Canada and the United States, when Anglo-Saxon language and customs were positioned at the sociocultural apex (Gusa 2010, 468). Fobazi Ettarh (2018) observes that the library has long been perceived as an aspirational physical and intellectual space steeped in Western aesthetics and sensibilities; our modern minds conjure the image of cloistered, medieval European male monks hovering over illuminated manuscripts. This imagery isn't accidental, particularly when we consider how non-European contributions to the printing revolution have been downplayed in favor of European exceptionalism. Sheldon Gunaratne states that this alleged "exceptionalism" serves to "[disregard] the alleged European historical continuity and implicitly denigrates non-European achievements" (2001, 461). This level of denigration has constructed and uplifted the Eurocentricized library to the point where a sense of vocational awe pervades library labour (Ettarh 2018), making it incredibly difficult for anyone, but

most especially BIPOC library workers, to critique or reproach absurd policies and practices. It is important to note here that issues surrounding class play a role in even white library workers' ability to navigate and critique bureaucracy; however, regardless of class status, BIPOC library workers are always positioned as interlopers in this sacred white space. Critical Race Theory allows us to unpack the effects that these traditional practices and norms have upon these "interlopers"—specifically, BIPOC library workers.

Analyses of library bureaucracy (which are few) have yielded little insight into or critique of the effects of such systems on BIPOC. Galvan writes that "neutrality is the safest position for libraries because it situates whiteness not only as default, but rewards and promotes white cultural values" (2015). Despite (or, perhaps more accurately, *because of*) the fact that 86% of the librarians in higher education are white (ALA 2012), Honma (2005) observes that LIS scholars and students have been resistant to openly and honestly critiquing white privilege in librarianship. Critical discussions of libraries—including those generated in the #critlib Twitter community—are not always explicit about "White Supremacy, which is built into the foundations of this country, [and] often goes unacknowledged, unaddressed, unanalyzed" (Leung and López-McKnight 2020, 15).

Because of its origins in legal scholarship, CRT is particularly salient to a critique of bureaucracy. Weber argued that of the three types of domination (traditional, charismatic, and legal rational authority) exercised in society, legal rational authority was the type most intertwined with bureaucracy (Allen 2004). Though legal authority is based on consistent, abstract rules that even leaders must follow, these rules become more opaque as one ascends within a bureaucratic hierarchy; here, rational bureaucratic practices belie an elitist ideology in which only certain types of people (read: white) truly reap the social benefits (Allen 2004). CRT recognizes that legal authority, in particular, uplifts whiteness by continuing "to reproduce the structures and practices of racial domination" (Crenshaw et al. 1995, xxv). CRT also rejects the notion that equality under the law stems from neutrality and colourblindness, arguing that meritocracy is a fallacy because "we all inherit advantages and disadvantages, including the historically accumulated social effects of race" (Carbado 2011, 1608).

Racial liberalism—which contends that everyone is equal under the law, regardless of their personal histories or circumstances (Delgado and Stefancic 2017)—is a mainstay of impersonal bureaucracy because it allows libraries to dance around conversations related to antiracism in the name of neutral policy. In academic libraries, Eurocentric collegial and teaching practices (e.g., using Robert's rules in meetings, centering quantitative assessment practices) sustain norms of assumed

neutrality, objectivity, and meritocracy, while simultaneously delegitimizing the epistemologies and cultural capital of communities of colour (Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 2021). These actions are formalized through problematic institutional policies, and hostile racial climates prevail because administrators fail to address how white ideologies uphold structures of domination and oppression (Gusa 2010). Ettarh (2014) observes that institutional neutrality is a privileged stance that libraries deploy to support dominant culture by actively marginalizing and harming BIPOC. Crenshaw et al. (1995, xiv) write:

> Racial justice was embraced in the American mainstream in terms that excluded radical or fundamental challenges to status quo practices in American society by treating the exercise of racial power as rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained.

CRT argues that the deep and complex oppression of BIPOC is structural and cannot be easily mitigated by addressing discrete incidents, nor by treating everyone the same (Carbado 2011). As a consequence of the profound failure to substantively address institutional racism, the library transforms into a fantastical, ahistorical space where affective notions such as awe and nostalgia (Santamaria 2020) grounded in white cultural traditions simultaneously flourish and complicate the denaturalization of whiteness in academia (Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro 2015). CRT challenges such ahistoricism by revealing how the library's perpetration of inequities through its bureaucratic practices is part of a historical continuum of racism (Lawrence et al. 2018, 6).

Structured Group Work Functioning as Domination and Oppression

We have so far examined the intersection of CRT with analyses of bureaucracy and libraries; now, we will turn specifically to an examination of structured group work as one manifestation of bureaucratic systems that should be investigated and reimagined. Structured group work disproportionately contributes to the paralysis, frustration, and oppression of BIPOC library workers. Such work is driven by the necessary and practical goals of developing functional systems, workflows, and procedures (Hudson 2017), but identifying a clear charge or task can be challenging if there are hidden agendas or lack of transparency. As Kieran Allen states, "Bureaucracy has invented the concept of the 'official secret' which means the information can be gathered and exact commands transmitted in a secretive way" (2004, 113). Keeping secrets is an expression of what CRT scholar Cheryl Harris calls *whiteness as property*, a stand-in for "whiteness [as an] exclusive club whose membership [is] closely and grudgingly guarded" (1993, 1736). In this respect, secrecy is a power move that gaslights BIPOC—a way of gatekeeping, where information is used to dominate marginalized groups.

Historically, LIS co-opted technical and managerial language to overemphasize pragmatic administrative concerns (Hudson 2017) while failing to cast a critical eye on how these bureaucratic systems marginalize a good number of library workers. David James Hudson writes that "our very expectations and assumptions about the practical character and value of our field subtly police the work we end up doing and supporting" (2017, 205). It is not surprising, then, that BIPOC lack the agency to reject roles or responsibilities that are considered absurd; in some cases, they may have a harder time recognizing the inherent absurdity of situations masquerading as initiatives of efficiency. It is a massive undertaking for BIPOC to unpack "foundational assumptions—and their material implication in the dispossessive violence of existing social, political, and economic arrangements—when [their] environment is governed by expectations of efficiency, directness, brevity, speed" (Hudson 2017, 212).

Graeber uses the concept of interpretive labour to describe how workers engage in emotional labour in order to discern management's intentions (Graeber 2015, 70). For BIPOC, interpretive labour takes on additional weight as they are expected to understand and conform to librarianship's (white) professional standards without being fully apprised of these qualities (Thomas and Hollenshead 2001, 172). BIPOC must absorb meeting expectations, figure out to whom one should direct questions or delegate tasks, and also adopt white academic jargon. The combination of these aspects of working in librarianship as a person of colour takes an emotional, mental, and physical toll (Chou and Pho 2017, 236).

Furthermore, the professional performance of BIPOC vis-à-vis visual representation and intellectual contributions to the group are informed by and judged against white norms. Galvan (2015) observes that performing whiteness requires invested time and wealth; it's an involved enterprise ranging from hair styling to attire to eliminating accents, and so on, that conceals marginalized librarians' authentic selves. To survive and thrive in librarianship, BIPOC must remove, or at the very least downplay, all markers of intersectional identities in order to embrace a paradigm of whiteness. These actions are part of what Kaetrena Davis Kendrick (2018) terms *deauthentication*, where BIPOC preempt microaggressions in order to navigate and be accepted into primarily white workplaces. Lindsay Pérez Huber and Daniel Solórzano (2015) observe that racial microaggressions are acts of everyday, subtle racism (e.g., questioning phenotype and/or immigration status) that serve to remind BIPOC of their marginalized status in a society where whiteness is the default. The very presence of microaggressions, CRT argues, repudiates the belief that "racism only manifests in egregious and blatant acts of exclusion . . . [rather it] is instead shrouded in discourses of merit, fairness, and personal responsibility" (Dixson and Anderson 2017, 44).

That so many library administrators are white men contradicts any notion of fairness and also adds a gendered aspect to interpretive labour. Despite comprising only 20% of the profession as a whole, men still make up 40% of those in leadership roles in ARL libraries (Kyrillidou and Morris 2011). This imbalance in the library profession serves to contribute to the absurd practices as women are expected to "imagine what one situation or another would look like from a male point of view," while "[men] are almost never expected to do the same for women" (Graeber 2015, 70). Challenging such imbalances in the field is complicated, but Ettarh (2014) notes that several female-identifying librarians in the field have advocated for "leaning in" and self-promotion at work. Ettarh states,

> This advice is well intentioned, but may not work for everyone. These conversations are instigated by people from white, middle-class backgrounds and are grounded in their experiences of privilege . . . The "Lean In" advice is, in fact, about how to have it all, while offering precisely zero guidance on how to dismantle the structural barriers to gender equity that still impede most women.

Ultimately, the emotional and interpretive labour of working in such gendered, raced, and classed environments takes so much effort that it leaves no space for women, especially those who identify as BIPOC, to think about their own perspective or how to voice perspectives that may deviate from what is considered and accepted as the norm; in this respect, they are left to engage in absurd practices in ways that are guided by and satisfy those in management.

In what Graeber calls "relations of domination," BIPOC are positioned as the subordinates who must take on the emotional burden of understanding how institutionalized, white hegemonic social codes function (2015, 70). This toll is exacerbated when BIPOC workers attempt to identify and name absurd practices within the white supremacist culture that they are expected to navigate, and voicing these concerns out loud may not be in their best interests. Indeed, BIPOC may be perceived as unprofessional and ignorant if they state that something is absurd. bell hooks writes,

> an effective strategy of white supremacist terror and dehumanization during slavery centered around white control of the Black gaze . . . reduced to the machinery of bodily physical labour, Black people learned . . . the habit of casting the gaze downward so as not to appear uppity. To look directly was an assertion of subjectivity, equality. (1992, 168)

BIPOC, especially Black library workers, may struggle to "assert subjectivity" in collaborative settings because they are entangled in the formidable tasks of both decoding the absurd and naming these practices as absurd to white colleagues and administrators who have a vested interest in maintaining the dominant culture and its common practices. BIPOC risk being cast aside, picked on, terminated, and even

chastised publicly and on a wide scale when directly challenging administration or the dominant culture. They are meant to look down or away.

These seemingly staid bureaucratic systems and associated practices result in "ignoring all the subtleties of real social existence and reducing everything to preconceived mechanical or statistical formulae" (Graeber 2015, 75). In disregarding relational aspects of work, a library focuses on the primary function of a bureaucracy, which is "ensur[ing] its efficiency and its competency and . . . minimiz[ing] outside influences" (Lynch 1979, 267). However, the term *outside influences* assumes an entirely new meaning, particularly with concern to institutions that purport to center social justice, when we consider that BIPOC library workers may always be viewed as "outsiders." Kalberg (1980, 1158) writes that the most "'rational' type of domination is found in the bureaucracy simply because it aims to do nothing more than calculate the most precise and efficient means for the resolution of problems by ordering them under universal and abstract regulations." This positivist approach to the work is, indeed, a domination of sorts where we understand "outside influences" as being anything or anyone capable of disrupting the library's institutional values, which are necessarily steeped in hegemonic whiteness (Galvan 2015; Hathcock 2015; Honma 2005).

Conclusion: It's Not a Bug, It's a Feature

We can then see that it is by intentional design that BIPOC are silenced by bureaucratic structures, thereby maintaining the hegemonic power structures of the organizations that employ them—even if these organizations position themselves as social justice–oriented. Critical Race Theory, with its origins in legal scholarship, provides us with a lens through which we can observe and critique bureaucratic structures within academic libraries and their associated values of neutrality and rationality. Although structured group work and the bureaucracies in which they exist serve to disempower library workers of all backgrounds, Critical Race Theory explains why they are particularly disastrous for BIPOC. Even when it is not a white man in the management position, these dysfunctional, absurd groups that follow institutionalized white-washed practices are set up for failure. Continuing to adopt these practices without specifically naming and addressing the white supremacy that is built into their foundations will prevent libraries from ever being the inclusive, diverse, and equitable spaces they purportedly wish to become. Ultimately, this work leads to decisions or outcomes that fail students, staff, faculty, and the communities we serve.

However, we do not believe that libraries and those that work within them are doomed to exist within these structures. Instead, we call upon those within the

library community to work towards creating systems that are more "authentic, liberatory, and imaginative" (Leung and López-McKnight 2020, 18). Foundational to this call is the prioritization of the experiences and expertise of BIPOC library workers in shaping everything from library services, to processes and policies, to the definition of what a library is and can be. As Yousefi states, change within libraries is not complete upon the hiring of BIPOC workers; these commitments to diversity need to extend beyond hiring a diverse group of people to accepting the different ways of behaving, speaking, and thinking that diverse library workers bring with them (2017).

Part of imagining a liberatory future in libraries involves disrupting the current systems. Here, we take inspiration from Yousefi's library tactics of resistance (2017) which are adapted from Easterling's expanded activist repertoire (2014). In particular, two tactics directly challenge the lack of transparency in bureaucratic systems: gossip and exaggerated compliance. Gossip, in this context, isn't about spreading unconfirmed tales; rather, as Yousefi observes, it's a "significant tool of information sharing with and among marginalized individuals and groups—a way to subvert established norms, procedures, and assumptions" (2017, 98). For example, when we create affinity groups inside and outside of our organizations among BIPOC library workers, our gossip is a way of validating one another and acknowledging, *yes, that thing really happened*. Yousefi asserts that "by telling our stories, we may help reduce the epistemic doubt of others" (2017, 98). The other tactic, exaggerated compliance, can be an accountability tool that undermines the secrecy of libraries by putting into practice two cherished professional values of our profession: openness and transparency (Yousefi 2017, 101). For managers especially, exaggerated compliance entails a commitment to investigating why certain types of information are deemed confidential, while others are appropriate to share (Yousefi 2017, 102). Yousefi notes that relying on employee discretion to keep non-confidential information hidden "promotes an unequal access to information by reinforcing the patronizing and false assumption that people would simply not be interested" (102).

By distributing information equally, we begin to dismantle the secrecy inherent in the bureaucratic structure, along with the white hegemonic standards of professionalism, in order to envision a more equitable future for ourselves. A bureaucratic structure is just one example of a set of processes that can and should be reimagined with, for, and by BIPOC library workers. Because only when our way of conducting work reflects the values and experiences of BIPOC library workers will it be truly inclusive.

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